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The Pre-Tribulation Rapture (A Devastating Doctrine)

"In the world you have tribulation, but take courage:
I have overcome the world." ([John 16:33](#))

"Through many tribulations we must enter the
Kingdom of God." ([Acts 14:22](#))

by [Paul Sumner](#)

After reading Scripture and Christian commentaries and Christian history, for many years, I've concluded:

The doctrine of a secret Pre-Tribulation **Rapture** ("catching away") of Christians by Jesus Christ—**before** the appearance of the Antichrist and his deceptive and violent reign over the world—is **not biblical**.

Some popular books promote the doctrine: *Left Behind* or *The Blessed Hope* or *The Great Disappearance*. But it's important to go behind such titles to examine how the authors interpret "prophetic" passages in the entire Bible, and if they thoroughly survey church history.

[For a PDF version of this study click [HERE](#).]

Historically, the Pre-Trib Rapture teaching is not taught by the New Testament apostles. The evidence is that it emerged in Scotland in 1830, when a woman named **Mary MacDonald** said she received a "revelation" that the Church would not go through the end-time Tribulation.

Other church historians attribute the Rapture doctrine to **Edward Irving**, the leading figure in forming the Catholic Apostolic Church in England in the 1830s (MacDonald's time frame). Just who first heard this "truth" from whom (or Whom) may not be clear, but it ignited and spread like fire in the early 19th century.

The Anglo-Irish Bible teacher **John Nelson Darby** (1800-1882) reportedly believed that this new truth given to Mary MacDonald was from God, and during the **Powerscourt Conference** in 1831-33, he publicly declared his supporting convictions. He then spread the idea

among the **Plymouth Brethren**, among whom he was an influential leader.

Later, in America, the doctrine was widely promoted through **C. I. Scofield's Study Bible** (1909, 1917), and it became a central pillar of the Dispensational Movement. It is still taught in many Protestant evangelical Bible schools, seminaries and churches as part of their doctrinal portfolio. It is by far the dominant prophetic view found in Evangelical mass media.

Some Messianic Jewish scholars and organizations also teach the Pre-Trib Rapture as part of their pro-Israel, prophetic Last Days scenario.

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Word Facts

The central *idea* of the doctrine is that Jesus Christ will one day, unexpectedly, appear in the heavens to seize and remove loyal Christians from earth. That seizing is based on the Greek verb *harpazo* found in 1 Thessalonians 4:17:

"We who are alive and remain [to the end] shall be **caught up** [*harpagesometha*] together with them [the righteous dead] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."

There is nothing inherent in the verb *harpazo* that describes a *secret* catching up of human bodies off the earth.

In another cited Rapture proof-text, also written by Paul (2 Thess 2:3,4), it's important to notice what *else* he says to his hearers about the *timing of the harpazo*. He makes clear that in the last days "**those who remain alive**" will witness:

1. "the apostasy" [*apostasia*] (v. 3)
2. "the man of lawlessness" [*anomias*] (v. 3)
3. "the son of destruction" [*apoleias*], who performs deceptive signs and miracles by satan's power and proclaims himself "as being God." (v. 4)

In both letters to the Thessalonians, Paul says Christians who see these various events will be *on earth*. They will not have been raptured and observe them while looking down from heaven.

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Besides the Rapture doctrine's ambiguous, disputable support from the Bible, **Three** issues deeply concern me.

First Concern

It dismays me how some Christian teachers who promote the Pre-Trib Rapture doctrine openly **condemn** other Christians who don't accept it as biblical.

In fact, dissent from the popular Rapture view is an issue of **Timing**. It's not *if* Jesus will return to earth, but *when*.

Numerous faithful "No-Pre-Tribs" (my term) know the Bible says the Messiah will return. They don't believe he will come **before** the Tribulation to rescue the elect.

"Messiah...will appear a second time, for salvation...to those who eagerly await him." (Hebrews 9:28)

Yet many Pre-Trib Rapturists cloud this distinction [timing *versus* if] in their effort to portray fellow believers as those who outright reject the biblical doctrine of the Second Coming itself. This is simply untrue. Many just refuse to discuss the topic and allow alternate interpretations of Scripture. This reveals their insecurity about their convictions. They rail against dissenters, perhaps because they suspect the others might be right.

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Keen observers of Christian mass media culture know there are other, more pragmatic reasons why dissenters from the Pre-Trib position are disparaged.

To be frank, the Pre-Trib Rapture doctrine is a **multi-million-shekel cash cow**.

Those who question this doctrine throw shadows on the authority and reputation of those who teach and preach it. That can lead to reduced church and prophecy conference attendance, loss of TV viewers, radio and podcast listeners — not to mention loss of social media likes, falling book sales, and shrinking donations from disillusioned believers who had previously trusted specific ministries.

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What If I'm Wrong?

So, how is my dissent from this **debatably ambiguous doctrine** a threat to anyone? What difference does it make what I personally believe about *any issue* involving the prophetic future?

Will God punish me for not believing in a pre-Tribulation Rapture

Escape?

Will He leave me behind on earth to one day watch millions of true believers ascend into the clouds to meet Christ in the air. Then spitefully abandon me to suffer persecution by the forces of antichrist?

Most importantly:

Where in the Bible is the Rapture Doctrine the determining factor about any person's future destiny? **Will someone's faith in Messiah Jesus's atoning sacrifice be counted irrelevant** (contra John 3:16) because of a squabble over a human-created doctrine?

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Second Concern

I strongly object to the Pre-Trib Rapture doctrine because of its embedded interpretations regarding **Israel and the Jewish people**.

According to Dispensational Pre-Trib manuals, after Christians are secretly taken out of this world, "the Jews" are left on earth to face the oppression of Antichrist.

A popular Southern California preacher articulates a common paradoxical view about the Church and Israel in a sermon from March 2022. After warning his audience about a "damnable...anti-Semitic or demonic" heresy called *British Israelism*, he immediately says:

"God is not done with the nation Israel, and in fact God is preparing the nation Israel, for not only its existence, it has some **horribly, horrific times ahead** in the Tribulation period before its glorious days—that God intended it to enjoy—come." [Source: [Jack Hibbs: Real Life Radio Sermons](#)]

This Protestant leader reflects a widespread view that while raptured Christians are in heaven dining at the "wedding supper of Christ" (Rev 19:9), Jewish families and their children will endure demonic persecution in anti-Semitic campaigns far worse than anything in human history. Rapture teachers often call this "the time of Jacob's Trouble" [*et tzarah le-Yaakov*] as prophesied in Jeremiah 30:7.

This, for me, is a **dark, anti-Christ message** in the Pre-Trib doctrine.

The horrific events of **7 October 2023** in Israel, perpetuated by demonically-enraged Hamas murderers, could obviously

qualify as a time of "trouble" [*tzarah*] for many Jews and non-Jews, if not the whole nation. But there have been no reports on CNN or Instagram of mass disappearances of Christians from the world just prior to 7 October. Apparently, this "tribulation" upon Jews doesn't qualify as a sign that the Rapture—of Christians—is near.

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Almost apologetically, many Rapture teachers say there is still hope for "the Jews."

They say Christians will inherit the **Kingdom of God**—in heaven—while Jews who repent and convert to Christianity during the Tribulation period will *eventually* inherit the **Kingdom of Heaven**—on earth. (A geographical paradox.)

In other words, Jews who become "Christian" during the Tribulation are not in the same class as Non-Jews who become "Christian" before then.

This smacks of Gentile arrogance, echoing all forms of **Marcionic, anti-Judaic, Successionist** theology that has plagued the Church ever since the time of Paul (Romans 11:17-24).

It echoes the anger and resentment of the brother who didn't think his prodigal sibling should be welcomed back into their father's house. But Christians should note: his father rebuked him, "We had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found" (Luke 15:32).

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Finally, in contrast to this theological Two-Tiered Universe [Christians in heaven, Jews on earth], Jesus creates a dilemma for Rapture advocates. He says the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the Hebrew prophets will one day occupy **both** the Kingdom of God **and** the Kingdom of Heaven.

"Many shall come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the **Kingdom of Heaven.**" (Matt 8:11)

"There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the **Kingdom of God,**" but you yourselves being thrown out. And they will come from east and west, and from north and south, and will recline [*at table*] in the **kingdom of God.**" (Luke 13:28-29)

Yet Jesus tells us there is only *one Kingdom* for God's people: "The righteous will shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father" (Matt 13:43).

Christians often warn Jews that they're open to God's judgment for their willful unbelief. True. The Hebrew prophets preached this throughout the Old Testament. But Paul says that Gentile Christians are **also** accountable for their willful hubris toward Jews.

"Do not be arrogant toward the [natural olive] branches [the Jewish people]... **Do not be conceited, but fear**; for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you... If you [do not] continue in his kindness...**you also will be cut off.**" (Romans 11:18, 20-21)

[See my study: "[Why Pray for Jerusalem?](#)"]

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Third Concern

The final reason I don't accept the Pre-Tribulation Rapture theory is a biblical teaching is that it sets people up for a **catastrophic collapse of their faith**. And I don't believe God would do that to His sons and daughters.

This, in fact, has happened countless times over the last three centuries since this Pre-Trib Rapture doctrine has been disseminated around the world by missionaries, Christian literature, and satellite evangelists.

Christians in several oppressive countries were taught that Jesus was coming soon to take them out of trouble. Believing so, they did not flee or choose to fight their oppressors.

Many perished, needlessly, clutching to misplaced hope that God loved them and would rescue them from danger, even death. But their faith was not rewarded (as expected), and they were terribly shaken. They believed God had failed them—even lied to them.

(The subtitle of a recent Rapture book is "31 Ways to Be Rapture Ready." The author doesn't apparently warn people to expect persecution and possibly death for being loyal to their faith.)

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Let's be sober about this.

Of what value is the secret Rapture Message that Christ is coming **at any moment** to snatch them out of the clutches of evil, when they are faithful believers who are nonetheless perishing daily in Communist and Islamic countries like China, North Korea, Russia, Nigeria, Palestine?

How does the Rapture Message give strength and endurance to believers in Jesus in **Western Democracies** who are now seeing their countries being ripped apart and taken over by anti-Christian anti-Semitic racist progressive leftist Marxists?

And we don't know how many **Israeli Jewish believers in Yeshua** have succumbed to the ongoing onslaught of Islamic hordes since **7 October 2023**.

If some believers are banking on a last-second Disappearance from tribulation in the future, they are not preparing themselves for the hardships of persecution [**and the victories**] for serving the Lord that come from human antagonists who work as agents of satan.

Jesus said, "If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you... A slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (Matthew 24:18, 20).

In light of his Master's words, Paul said: "**All** who desire to live godly in Messiah Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). He said **All** — meaning everyone, everywhere, any time in history.

These universal hardships for Jesus's people **preface** the great Hardship. But for the sake of the Elect—not humanity at large—he will limit its duration (Mark 13:20). God will end the Great (satanic) Tribulation, then initiate his own tribulation of judgment on **evil** beings. [Note Isaiah chapter 4.]

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In contrast to satan's wrath on believers, Messiah's retribution on **evil** people and nations is called "the Wrath of the Lamb" (Rev 6:16). It will be central to the ultimate "[Armageddon: God's Final War with Evil Men.](#)"

It is sober to remember:

"God has **not** destined us [believers] for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord, Jesus Messiah" (1 Thess 5:9). Jesus "rescues us from [his] wrath to come" (1 Thess 1:10). Emphatically, **His wrath** will not fall on his own people.

Jesus's prayer to God reminds **us all** of What and Whom we actually

struggle with every day: "Father...I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from **the Evil One**" (John 17:11, 15).

If you and I lose our physical life at the hands of the Evil One and his human slaves, we will not lose our **Life**.

The Messiah himself—the "oppressed" and "afflicted" One [Isa 53:7]; the One "despised" and "abhorred" by his own Jewish people [Isa 49:7]—said to everyone of his people, Jew and non-Jew:

"Let not your heart be troubled. In the world you have tribulation, but take **courage**. My sheep hear my voice. They shall **never perish**; and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. **No one** is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."
(John 14:1; 16:33; 10:28, 9)

- [Paul Sumner](#)

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These authors focus on the whole content of Scripture and review the history of the rapture doctrine among Protestant denominations.

- George Eldon Ladd, [The Blessed Hope](#) (1956)
- Dave MacPherson, [The Incredible Cover-Up \(The True Story of the Pre-Trib Rapture\)](#) (1975)
- William Sanford LaSor, [The Truth About Armageddon \(What the Bible Says About the End Times\)](#) (1982)

Elsewhere on this website, see a review of [William Sanford LaSor's](#) book on [Armageddon](#).

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"There is a river whose streams [*pelagim*] make glad the city of God."
(Psalm 46:4)